

LIMERICK have not enjoyed the luck of the other leading hurling counties as far as the championships are concerned, and there is no doubt that, but for this factor, Shannonside would enjoy probably double the present number of titles that stand to her credit.

The story of the Castleconnell bids in 1910 and 1911 are examples of this failure to successfully court Dame Fortune. No county more deserved the blue riband during that period, and no combination in the history of the All-Ireland arena met such a succession of cruel blows to deprive them of at least a few titles, which their prowess and the great men they fielded certainly entitled them to.

Something similar could be written of the spell from 1918 to 1924. Limerick had a powerful team again in those years—wonderful hurling figures, weight and stamina—in fact everything that went to make a champion side then.

SOLDIER OF THE REPUBLIC.

One of these soldiers of the Republic who figured as a reserve on the Limerick All-Ireland side of 1918, and later played his part "on the hills" against the forces of aggression, was Chris Ryan, of Pallasgreen, one of a quartette from that old hurling stronghold who helped at the time to keep Limerick well in the limelight of our national pastime.

When the War against the British eventually came to an end, and the last khaki-clad soldier and Black and Tan made their exit from most of the national territory, Limerick swept back into the hurling picture, and the great victory of 1921, though delayed more than twelve months, due to the political situation, stamped Garryowen the team of the era.

The G.A.A. weathered the storm of foreign aggression and emerged possibly stronger than at any period in its history to then. The might of empire failed to kill the spirit of the Gael. Persecution, in fact, only helped in the opposite direction and national spirit and well being probably reached their peak when British bombs and bayonets were doing their damndest to kill every spark of Gaelic fire smouldering anywhere in the land.

UNENVIABLE POSITION.

When brother turned against brother, however, in one of the most painful episodes in the long, sad story of Ireland, the G.A.A. found itself in a most unenviable position. The British were gone—the common foe were no more—and the new "troubles" in the land could have split the G.A.A. far more than did the Parnell "split" of a generation earlier.

During the Parnell strife the G.A.A. dwindled in power and influence to such a degree that at one period only three counties were affiliated and clubs dropped to a mere handful. That the same, or even worse, did not happen in the 1922-23 period, is the greatest tribute that could be paid to the wise guidance of the Central Council of the time.

Internal politics were rigidly barred—the almost inevitable split was averted—and within a short time of the conclusion of hostilities the G.A.A. was playing a new role by bringing together on the playing fields the men who had been pitted against one another in the most bitter struggle a people may endure.

OF GOOD GAELIC STOCK.

Born in the closing hours of the last century—on Christmas day, 1899, to be exact, Chris Ryan came of good Gaelic stock. Three

of his uncles—Tom, John, and James Barry—won the All-Ireland senior hurling title with London-Irish in 1901, whilst another uncle, Willie, was a champion mile runner. His brother, Dick, won the 1918 All-Ireland crown with Limerick, and another brother, Ted, played inter-county football for Limerick.

There was no hurling in Pallas School as Chris grew to manhood, but he was only fifteen years of age when a junior team was organised in the parish. The Ryans played a leading part in this. Dick was captain, and with four more of the family, plus Paddy Kennedy and his three brothers, they almost had the team to themselves. Anyway, they surprised Gaelic Limerick by winning the county junior hurling title at the first effort.

IN SENIOR RANKS.

In senior ranks the following year they performed so well that when it came to the picking of the team for the 1918 senior All-Ireland final two lads from Pallas were included thereon: Paddy Kennedy and Dick Ryan, whilst Chris Ryan and Mick Bourke were included as reserves.

From 1918 onwards, Chris figured regularly for a dozen years as a member of the county team, except for a period in 1925, during which he was laid up, having sustained a broken leg playing football.

His recipe for keeping fit was to indulge in "pucking around" every evening, coupled with plenty of walking. They had no means of transport then and it was part of the training schedule to walk to and from the field, which was sometimes four or five mile away.

EXCITING INCIDENT.

Chris had a most exciting incident in one of the many matches in which he figured. He was playing for Limerick in a game against Tipperary, in aid of Dundrum Convent. The venue was the Convent Grounds, and one touchline ran very close to the bank of the River Suir. During an exciting bout of play, Chris was running along the wing near the bank, and when trying to recover the sliotar, slipped and went diving into the river. He had to swim out, and played on after changing his jersey. An interested spectator at the match was the late Most Rev. Dr. Harty, Archbishop of Cashel and Patron of the G.A.A., who laughed heartily at the incident and often spoke of it in after years. Chris, none the worse of his experience, had to drive home twenty miles on a jarvey car afterwards.

During his twelve years in Limerick's green and white, Chris Ryan played many great games and had the distinction of collecting the first score—a goal, in the 1921 All-Ireland Final against Dublin. He met many famous players in his day and considers J. D. Arcey of Tipperary with the Cork pair—E. Coughlan and M. O'Connell—the best of his era.

PRESENT-DAY PLAYERS AND STANDARDS

He considers the present day players not as good as those with whom he oft lined up and pinpoints the difference in the fact that the lads of to-day do not seem to have the same enthusiasm as the young men of his time.

Likewise, he considers the standard of both hurling and football has deteriorated. He feels that the referees are a lot to blame for this as they blow the whistle too often now for trivial offences.

The final of the 1921 All-Ireland Championship was not played until March 4th, 1923, and that same year Chris Ryan had the distinction of winning another All-Ireland trophy when he figured in the national final of the All-Army

Championship and helped in a great but narrow victory for his side.

The national games in the Army are not, unfortunately, in the same healthy position now that they were in those days when many of the fighting men of the War of Independence were associated with it. General Michael Collins knew well the merits of the G.A.A. from the national viewpoint, and into it he threw himself with all the enthusiasm of a healthy and vigorous youth. A fine all round athlete, he always competed at the athletic events in sports held under G.A.A. auspices, and particularly excelled in the long jump. He played both hurling and football, with the former his favourite game, and acted in London for a number of years as Secretary of the Geraldine Club.

GENERAL EOIN O'DUFFY

General Eoin O'Duffy, who presided at the meeting which formed the Army Athletic Association, was Army Chief of Staff at the time and also a member of the Central Council of the G.A.A., having previously served for long years as Secretary of the Ulster Council. Efforts were made to introduce other games to the Army but he stood steadfast. I quote from his memoirs: "I was told even by certain Ministers that, from the 'social' viewpoint, I should seek union of all sportsmen—Gaelic, rugby and soccer. They could not convince me, however, that deviation from the Gaelic way would be genuinely beneficial to Ireland. I cannot criticise rugby or soccer, never having seen a match in either code. I do not object to the games as such at all, but to their alien origin and associations. Pearse said: 'You need not denounce English games—play Irish ones.' Sooner or later, people who desparage or are apathetic to our national games, to our dances, music and language, will shed the veneer—no matter how important they may seem in the national life, I believe the G.A.A. has done more good and is liable to do more good in respect of promoting essential Irish unity, by standing to its principles than by wavering or compromise."

BLOODY SUNDAY

General O'Duffy continues: "Later, my old friend of Monaghan G.A.A. and I.R.A. days, Dan Hogan, became General Hogan, Chief of Staff, and continued the task, imbuing his men everywhere with the fine spirit of the Gaelic games he knew and loved so well.

"I recall a Monday night in November, 1920, when Dan Hogan reached Draperstown in Co. Derry. Our kindly host had the 'Irish Independent,' which displayed on the front page: 'Yesterday was Bloody Sunday in Dublin, Machine Guns turned on Footballers in Croke Park, Captain of the Tipperary team killed.' Having read the shocking news, I said to Dan: 'Did you know Mick Hogan of Grangemockler?' 'Yes,' said Dan, 'he is my brother; what about him?' I hesitated and then handed him the paper. Dan was himself a much wanted man at the time so we decided he could not attend the funeral, as one tragedy was enough for his mother to bear. We told the people of the house and knelt down and said the Rosary for the repose of Mick Hogan's soul."

It is an honour, indeed, that Chris Ryan can prize to have won a medal in that first All-Ireland hurling championship under Army Athletic Association auspices.